

**NOAA Fisheries Imposes Emergency Rule to Protect Sea Turtles from Drowning in
Shrimp Trawls in South Atlantic Waters**
Emergency Rule Set to Expire after 11:59 p.m. on July 7, 2004

NOAA Fisheries has imposed emergency restrictions that affect shrimpers operating in south Atlantic offshore waters from approximately Cape Fear, N.C. to just north of St. Augustine, Fla. Shrimpers trawling within that area are prohibited from fishing at night – between 9:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m.

These restrictions are effective immediately and will expire at 11:59 p.m. July 7, 2004. They are necessary because higher than normal shrimping effort in an area of high turtle concentrations is causing increased pressure on sea turtle (from multiple captures in shrimp trawls) which is causing an extraordinarily high number of sea turtle deaths. This action is necessary to reduce mortality of sea turtles listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA).

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources has notified NOAA Fisheries that from May 5, 2004, through May 24, 2004, 82 dead sea turtles washed ashore on Georgia's beaches. The condition of the stranded turtles indicates that they were healthy and actively foraging before they died, which is consistent with drowning in shrimp trawls. By comparison, over the previous 12 years for this time period, an average of 18 sea turtles stranded in Georgia. Whereas strandings are only a minimum indicator of actual mortality, these strandings represent a threat to the recovery and survival of the local sea turtle populations. Therefore, to reduce fishing pressure on sea turtles, NOAA Fisheries is implementing this emergency action.

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